1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

241 651 by the Marias. It deals with the village community through its mouthpieces, the headmen and the elders. Many have returned to Bastar from the Chanda Maria country. The best sign which I observed when I spent the first month of my 1934 furlough in the Abujhmar hills was that the long abandoned rice fields are all being restored to cultivation. It is interesting to note that the headman has never ventured to keep the commission for himself, but always either divides it among the villagers, or by common consent spends it on pork or liquor for a village feast.

241 In the Bison-horn country as a whole there is now as much permanent and semi-permanent cultivation as *penda*, and the *patwaris* have always been more accurate in their records. The people are more sophisticated and ready to safeguard their interests. The *penda* lands are fairly accessible, except in the hilliest parts. It has been pointed out already that each piece of each *penda* site, whether at the moment under bush or under crop, is now regarded as the individual holding of some cultivator. The people have many markets in their midst, and understand measures and seed capacities. It has not, therefore, been necessary to apply the poll-tax system there. A great deal could be done even there to turn the people from shifting to permanent cultivation by recognizing new permanent cultivation as an improvement.

Methods of permanent cultivation among the Hill Marias

Where the Hill Marias have started permanent cultivation they have in general adopted the methods of surrounding Murias or Bison-horn Marias, save that very few of them have mastered or attempted to master ploughing, but prepare the land with their *gudari* digging hoes. A few now keep hired Rawat herdsmen, but do not themselves tend, milk or work their cattle. If the recognition of permanent cultivation as an improvement could be combined with a determined attempt by the State to teach carting, ploughing and milking, even among the Bison-horn Marias, shifting cultivation would be greatly diminished.

243 312 When he does grow rice, the Hill Maria generally does not irrigate it with water led from a storage reservoir or tank; his method is rather to build his dam across a stream or waterway and to cultivate the land above it. The illustration opposite shows both sides of the dam made in 1930 for cultivation of this kind at Tondawada; the deep hole below the dam was made when its predecessor was washed away by an abnormal flood. No water flows here in the cold weather. First a wall of grass *tuwe*[1] was erected along the length of the dam, and behind this a wall of *welma*[1] horizontal pole fencing, supported behind with thicker pole piles

[1] See p. 132 for definition of *tuwe* and *welma*.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

PLATE XIV

312
243

TONDAWADA, HILL MARIA DAM FOR RICE CULTIVATION

Above Downstream face *Below* Upstream face

[Facing p. 146]

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

243 312 driven into the ground; these were buttressed further with slanting pole props with forked ends bearing against the vertical piles, while smaller forked poles were at intervals driven into the dam on either side of the piles, but below the slanting props. This vertical pole-revetting faced downstream. Against the upstream face of the grass *tum* earth was banked with a gentle slope and gently sloped off to ground level upstream. A large and nearly hollow tree-trunk was left in the middle of the dam, to act as a pipe to carry off excess water. They called the dam *nadi*, and the tank *ore*. It was not built to store water, but to retain moisture in the tank-bed, and it was the bed which was cultivated, being dug all over with the *gudari* before the rains. The dam was still serviceable when I visited Tondawada in 1934, four years later, and other small rice plots had been made higher up the waterway by placing low mud dams across it. Though the village had shifted from the adjacent site and the *penda* slopes under cultivation in 1934 were far away, these rice patches were being prepared for cultivation in readiness for the 1934 monsoon.

241 Though it has been said above that the Bison-horn Maria has as much permanent or semi-permanent cultivation as *penda*, there are many tracts in his country where *penda* is his main occupation. All Gonds or Koitor, wherever I have met them, seem at heart to long to revert to the raising of the light millets off the ashes of felled timber; though it is prohibited in the British districts of the Central Provinces, I have seen it in the *jagir* estates of the Chhindwara and Hoshangabad districts, and in the Nagpur district the prospect of being allowed to do this for the first year or two was in 1932 the best bait for attracting Gond settlers to a forest village in Ramtek tahsil and even to a malguzar's waste lands village in Saoner tahsil. So it would take little to make the far less advanced Bison-horn Maria abandon permanent rice cultivation and stick to *penda* on the hill slopes or *erka* on the plains; and much of his semi-permanent cultivation is only *parka* cultivation of former *erka* lands necessitated by their final refusal to bear any more forest after years of shifting cultivation; instead of at once applying permanent methods to the land, he cuts brushwood from other forests and brings them to the deforested land to burn instead of the brushwood it bore in former years. But in these *parka* fields he can raise only rice, not his beloved small millets. In his *penda* fields he sows only *kutki*, *Panicum miliaceum*, of the type sown as the main crop in the Abujhmar hills; but in many places the forest growth felled for his *penda* is almost pure bamboo, and here instead of *kutki* he sows what he calls *gondku*, which I have not had identified.

Bison-horn Maria cultivation

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

and its cultivation has spread among all lowland Gonds, who expect to pay their land revenue out of its proceeds.

Lastly there are the permanent rice lands, for wet cultivation. There are wide areas of permanently embanked and irrigated rice fields (*weda*), the use of which the Bison-horn Marias have learnt from their Hindu neighbours; more typical of them are the embankments of little hill-side watercourses into a series of descending little fields, which they call *jhorki weda*. The only fields which they consider can really be cultivated year after year, without resting fallow or the refreshment of wood ash or cow-dung ash, are the fields with good deep black soil; but too frequently the Maria has been elbowed out of such lands by the Hindu lessee of his village, or by Halba settlers. The other rice lands the Bison-horn Maria believes to become exhausted or 'develop sand' after two or three years' cultivation, and he then leaves them fallow for four or five years or more till they are covered with a thick growth of grasses and weeds, especially a grass he calls *chimmia*. The grass, although not burnt like forest in *erka* and *penda*, is looked upon by him in much the same way as a fertilizing agent to be ploughed into the soil; and so in a considerable degree even the cultivation of his *weda* rice fields must be regarded as shifting.

He ploughs these fallow lands up during the rains, unless, owing to their position, they are too wet to be ploughed till the end of the rains, and he repairs the embankments so that each field may retain ample water to rot the grass and weeds. At the end of the rains he gives them a second and more thorough ploughing, and leaves them alone all through the dry season. Just before the monsoon bursts he broadcasts rice seed, and then, when it has sprouted and there is adequate water in the fields, he follows the Chhattisgarhi practice of *biasi*; that is to say, he puddles up the field, young plants and all, by working all over it a flat log, on which he stands, yoked to a pair of oxen. When the land has been ploughed both before and at the end of the rains, the system is called *kohana*; where only the ploughing at the end of the rains has been possible, it is called *harhatti*. The second system is, of course, applied to all fields that have borne a crop just before being ploughed.

If it rains heavily before *kohana* and *harhatti* lands prepared in this way can be sown broadcast, they resort to the '*lai*' system. The seed is soaked in cold water and placed in baskets lined with the sacred *saja* leaves, filled with thick liquid cow manure, and covered over with *palas* (*Butea frondosa*) leaves; it is left thus for three or four days to sprout. The sprouted seed is washed out of the cow-dung with warm water, and is then sown broadcast. A

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

243 *kopar* or flat log is dragged by oxen over the field according as the seed has sprouted vigorously or slightly. In many parts of Bijapur and Dantewara tahsils the *lai* system of sowing is the normal rule. Bison-horn Marias also often take a *kopar* over their *parka* and *erka* fields after they have ploughed in the ashes after the first showers of rain, so as to ensure thorough mixing of the soil and ashes. Light or heavy rice is sown in the *weda* and *jhorki weda* fields according to its position; light rice ripening early is thus generally sown in the *jhorki weda*, which drains rapidly, and always in the dry *parka* lands. The mountain rices sown in *penda* and high-level *erka* lands cannot be acclimatized in the plains.

312 In the *Gazetteer* it was stated that the people of Bastar generally were very slow to understand the advantages of irrigation; land and rain are abundant everywhere except in the south. But of recent years many Bison-horn Maria villages have constructed small *mundas* or tanks, partly for irrigation, and partly to water their cattle; and tank-bed cultivation such as that in the Hill Maria village of Tondawada described earlier in this chapter is much commoner among them.

000 This completes this account of Hill and Bison-horn Maria agriculture. The Bison-horn Maria has a number of agricultural ceremonies to sanctify his various operations and of taboos like the Hill Maria, but far more, and, like his agricultural methods, more elaborate. They will be described in the chapter on religion; their recital in this chapter would have overburdened an already long account.